

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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SUBJECT: GENERAL ISRAEL TAL APPOINTED ASSISTANT TO MINISTER
OF DEFENSE

REF: TEL AVIV 6160

BEGIN SUMMARY: IN EFFORT TO STRENGTHEN STAFFING AT
MINISTRY OF DEFENSE, PERES HAS APPOINTED MAJOR
GENERAL ISRAEL TAL TO ASSUME SECOND POSITION AT MOD.
TAL BRINGS TO NEW ASSIGNMENT OUTSTANDING CAREER AS
STRATEGIST AND FORMER DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF. END SUMMARY

1. DURING MEETING THIS WEEK WITH ARMA, MAJOR GENERAL
(RES) ISRAEL TAL CONFIRMED THAT HIS RECENTLY ANNOUNCED
APPOINTMENT IN THE DEFENSE MINISTRY WILL BE, IN FACT,
AS NUMBER TWO TO DEFENSE MINISTER PERES. HE IS
SCHEDULED TO ASSUME THIS POSITION ON OCTOBER 1,
ALTHOUGH THIS DATE MAY BE ADVANCED DUE TO SUDDEN DEATH
OF MOD DIRECTOR GENERAL IRONI (REFTEL). SINCE ISRAELI
LAW STIPULATES THAT ONLY MEMBERS OF THE KNESSET CAN
HOLD TITLE OF DEPUTY MINISTER, TAL'S POSITION WILL BE
CALLED ASSISTANT TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENSE.

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2. THE LAST REAL "NUMBER TWO" IN THE DEFENSE MINISTRY WAS LT. GEN. (RES) ZVI TZUR, WHOSE TITLE WAS DEPUTY TO THE DEFENSE MINISTER. WHEN HE RESIGNED IN MARCH 1974, THIS TITLE WAS GIVEN TO MAJOR GENERAL (RES) MORDECHAI HOD. THE LATTER, HOWEVER, HAD INHERITED ONLY A FRACTION OF TZUR'S RESPONSIBILITIES, FEW WEEKS AGO HOD ANNOUNCED HIS INTENTION OF LEAVING THE MINISTRY FOR PRIVATE INDUSTRY. SEVERAL REPORTS SUGGESTED THAT THE REASON WAS DISSATISFACTION WITH HIS NARROWLY PRESCRIBED DUTIES. PERES REPORTEDLY TRIED TO PERSUADE TZUR TO RETURN TO HIS OLD JOB WITH NO SUCCESS.

3. AT THE SAME TIME, IT WAS REPORTED THAT IRONI ALSO WANTED TO RESIGN FROM THE MINISTRY. ACCORDING TO ZEEV SCHIFF, MILITARY CORRESPONDENT OF HAARETZ, TAL WAS ASKED TO REPLACE IRONI AS DIRECTOR/GENERAL. TAL REFUSED SINCE HIS APPOINTMENT WOULD HAVE REQUIRED HIM TO GIVE UP HIS EMERGENCY RESERVE APPOINTMENT AS CORPS COMMANDER OF THE SYRIAN FRONT.

4. TAL WAS THEN OFFERED THE NUMBER TWO POSITION. HE ACCEPTED ONLY AFTER WINNING OUT OVER CHIEF OF STAFF GUR, WHO INSISTED THAT THIS APPOINTMENT ALSO WOULD REQUIRE THAT TAL RELINQUISH HIS RESERVE APPOINTMENT. GUR'S CONCERN (AS WE REPORTED WHEN HE FOUGHT AND LOST THE SAME BATTLE WITH ARIK SHARON) WAS THAT HE COULD NOT BE EXPECTED TO BE SUBORDINATE IN PEACETIME TO AN OFFICER HE WOULD COMMAND IN WAR TIME. TAL'S ANSWER TO THAT WAS THAT SINCE THE IDF IS A MILITIA ARMY, THE WHOLE COUNTRY WAS USED TO LIVING WITH THIS PROBLEM. IN ANY EVENT TAL WILL RETAIN HIS RESERVE APPOINTMENT.

5. TAL HAS HAD A BRILLIANT CAREER IN THE IDF. HE IS AN OUTSTANDING TACTICIAN, AND MORE IMPORTANTLY A SUPERB STRATEGIST. FORMERLY COMMANDER OF IDF ARMOR CORPS, DURING THE OCTOBER 1973 WAR HE WAS DEPUTY COS AND CHIEF OF IDF OPERATIONS. HE WAS KNOWN AS "MR ARMOR" AND "MR DOCTRINE" OF THE IDF. HE IS ALSO THE FATHER OF THE ISRAELI-DESIGNED MAIN BATTLE TANK.

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6. AFTER THE 1973 WAR, HE SERVED AS COMMANDER OF THE SOUTHERN FRONT. AN ARGUMENT BETWEEN HIM AND THEN

DEFMIN DAYAN OVER GOI DECISION TO ALLOW SUPPLY CONVOYS TO REACH EGYPTIAN THIRD ARMY LED TAL TO RETIRE FROM THE IDF AND TO ACCEPT AN APPOINTMENT TO THE ISRAELI INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES. TAL EMERGED FROM THE OCTOBER 1973 WAR OFFICIALLY

UNSCATHED. IN A WAY, THIS WAS SURPRISING SINCE RESPONSIBILITY FOR DOCTRINE, STRATEGY, PLANNING, TRAINING, AND READINESS ALL FUNNELED THROUGH HIM (AS CHIEF OF OPERATIONS). IT WAS NO SECRET THAT BEFORE THE 1973 WAR, TAL ASPIRED TO THE COS POSITION. OUR DAO BELIEVES NOW, HOWEVER, THAT WHILE HE WOULD APPRECIATE THE HONOR OF BEING OFFERED THE POSITION, HE WOULD PROBABLY DECLINE.

7. COMMENT: GENERAL CONSENSUS IN IDF SEEMS TO BE THAT TAL IS AN EXTREMELY GOOD CHOICE FOR THE NUMBER TWO POSITION AT THE DEFENSE MINISTRY. HE IS AN APOLITICAL SOLDIER/INTELLECOUAL WITH SOLID MILITARY AND MANAGERIAL CREDENTIALS. HIS VIEWS ON THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES TEND TO BE DOVISH.
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